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THE U.S. DIPLOMATIC ROLE IN LEBANON'S
STRUGGLE FOR INDEPENDENCE DURING
THE SECOND WORLD WAR

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER ONE- Missionaries, Schools, and a Commission: American Interests and Policies in Lebanon before the Second World War	6
CHAPTER TWO- Fall of France, Fear of Germans, Finis to Mandate?	18
CHAPTER THREE- From Mediation to Taking Sides: The Evolution of an American Policy in Lebanon	53

CONCLUSION

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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INTRODUCTION

At three o'clock in the morning on November 11, 1943, Bishara al-Khuri, the newly elected President of Lebanon, was arrested and taken from his bed by French military authorities. By half past five George Wadsworth, the Consul General of the United States of America, was awakened by a French protocol officer of Lebanese origin who was against French policy in the Levant and who told him in a trembling tone that: "They have arrested the President and all the Ministers. French marines and Senegalese troops broke brutally into their houses. I have seen with my own eyes a decree signed by Helleu appointing Edde to the Presidency."¹

Within minutes a "strongly nationalist Lebanese journalist" also arrived at Wadsworth's residence and told of an attempt by French agents to arrest him. By the end of the day Wadsworth had met with the only two Lebanese ministers to have avoided arrest, and was visited at the American legation by a group of Lebanese deputies, a joint delegation comprised of representatives of rival Maronite and Moslem youth organizations, and a delegation of nearly one hundred doctors, lawyers, engineers and journalists.

These incidents are among the more dramatic examples of the contacts made by Lebanese nationalists with American

¹Wadsworth to Secretary of State, telegram no. 311, 11 Nov 1943, FRUS, 1943, vol. IV, p. 1013.

officials in Lebanon in order to recruit American support during the Second World War. From the Anglo-Free French invasion of Lebanon on June 8, 1941 until the end of the 1945 Franco-Lebanese crisis, the representatives of the United States of America in Lebanon were approached by a steady barrage of Lebanese who were attempting to secure American support for the termination of the French Mandate and the establishment of an independent Lebanon.

The historical record of these contacts raises the question of whether these Lebanese were able to influence the policy of the United States in a Middle Eastern country in which its previous interests had been limited to educational and missionary activities, it had no military presence, and its involvement would certainly be interpreted as interference by either Britain or France.

This study examines the American diplomatic role in Lebanon's struggle for independence during the Second World War. It seeks to describe U.S. policy, to probe the attempts of Lebanese nationalists to recruit U.S. support, and to determine the impact of their efforts on U.S. representatives in Beirut. The perspective of this study will be that of an observer in the U.S. Legation in Beirut during the Second World War.

This thesis will largely depend on the post records that were kept at the U.S. Legation in Beirut and later shipped to the United States for storage, and the State Department files

which contain some interdepartmental memorandum and others written especially 'for the record.' These records will be compared to the available memoirs of key participants will be consulted.

The often very critical accounts by Foreign Service Officers and State Department officials who were involved on the periphery of the events in Lebanon will be used to explain the atmosphere within the department and to keep events in perspective.

The Second World War was a watershed event that significantly changed America's role in world affairs and created the conditions which resulted in the independence of Lebanon. The central focus of this thesis is entwined in a confusing web of issues and events of the Second World War. In order to understand the attempts of Lebanese nationalists to influence the U.S. diplomatic role in Lebanon, these issues and events will be looked at in the historical context of the changing military situation, Allied strategic priorities, and the Lebanese perception that the U.S. was a rising power.

The events in Lebanon were also linked to the chain of events that had followed the West's dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire at the end of the First World War. The French mandate in the Levant is a result and Lebanon as it is defined by its current borders is also a product of that dismemberment. The topics of Anglo-French rivalry, French colonialism, Arab nationalism, and Lebanese identity are very

complicated and many pages have been spent discussing them. They provide essential background to the story that will be told in this thesis. However, just like the military campaigns of the Second World War, no attempt will be made to chronicle them in detail.

America's policies in Lebanon were part of an historic transition in American foreign policy. The principle of isolationism which had guided the United States in the world arena since Washington's Farewell Address was replaced by the commitments inherent in its wartime alliances and the spirit of internationalism expressed in the Atlantic Charter.

The Second World War represented a 'coming of age' of American Diplomacy. However, as noted by Gaddis Smith:

The small corps of career diplomats in the U.S. State Department was soon submerged and often pushed aside by military negotiators and the staffs of special wartime agencies ...President Roosevelt, at the top, presided serenely over bureaucratic chaos. He made no effort to impose order and thereby left many of his subordinates filled with frustration.²

American foreign policy during the Second World War had the personal stamp of the President and, like many of his successors, he often placed more confidence in the foreign policy advice of advisors other than his own Secretary of State. This has resulted in those who claim of the war-time State Department that "Few [of its members] made any contribution to the conduct of the war or to the achievement

²Gaddis Smith, p. 7.

of political purposes through war."³

Even so, the reporting of our diplomats in Beirut, and the attempts made to influence them by many Lebanese nationalist are not lacking in significance. The advice of the career American diplomats in Beirut played the significant role in formulating the policies that were adopted by the United States in Lebanon.

This is largely explained by the fact that Lebanon was a backwater for most of the war, but the events which led to its occupation by the Allies in 1941 at the beginning of the 'Rommel phase' of the North African campaign, and its continued occupation throughout the war indicate Lebanon's importance in the eyes of our British and French allies.

* * *

The primary task of this thesis is to recreate the events and perceptions of the period June 1941 through August 1945 as witnessed by the American Legation in Beirut. This is a case study of U.S. diplomatic history during the Second World War in a country of limited significance to the war and during a period when that country was of limited significance to the United States. This is also an historical case study of a 'would-be' client's attempt to influence the foreign policy of a 'soon-to-be' superpower.

³Dean Acheson, Present at the Creation: My Years in the State Department (New York: New American Library, 1969), p. 38.

CHAPTER ONE

MISSIONARIES, SCHOOLS, AND A COMMISSION: AMERICAN INTERESTS AND POLICIES IN LEBANON BEFORE THE SECOND WORLD WAR

The United States still holds a unique position in the Near East and American prestige and influence is still high. This results from a realization by the people of the area that the United States has no territorial or vested political interests there. Furthermore, since actions speak louder than words, this widespread goodwill toward the United States has become what might be described as a deep-seated conviction on the part of the peoples in this area, due mainly to a century of American missionary, educational and philanthropic efforts that have never been tarnished by any material motives or interest.⁴

The Secretary of State's description accurately portrays the Lebanese perception of America at the dawn of the Second World War. The United States was primarily known by Lebanese for its educational institutions in Lebanon, as a land of opportunity for many Lebanese emigrants, and for the First World War peace principles of President Woodrow Wilson that called for independence and autonomy for the non-Turkish portions of the Ottoman Empire.

If the image of the United States was untarnished, it was also because its policy toward the Middle East was generally characterized by deference to British and French

⁴Cordell Hull to Frederick Winant (U.S. Ambassador to Great Britain), T-4106, 27 August 1942, Foreign Relations of the United States, Diplomatic Papers, 1942 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1963), Vol. IV, pp. 26-7 [Hereafter referred to as FRUS].

political hegemony. In Lebanon there was acceptance of the French Mandate. This acceptance was necessary in order to protect U.S. educational and religious interests, as well as the rights of naturalized U.S. citizens who had returned to Lebanon.⁵

The United States had carefully avoided involvement in the politics of the region since the days of the Ottoman Empire. The establishment of diplomatic and consular representation in Lebanon was a result of the need to protect the endeavors of American interest groups.⁶ The American missionaries who had been involved in Lebanon since 1821 had made their institutions "paramount among U.S. interests in the Ottoman period."⁷ By 1900, according to diplomat Lloyd Griscom, "even the head of our State Department used to quake when the head of a Bible Society walked in."⁸

At the close of the 19th century there were over 150 schools in Syria and Lebanon. The American University in

See John A. DeNovo, American Interests and Policies in the Middle East, 1900-1939 (The University of Minnesota Press, 1963), chapters one and two for his discussion of U.S. interests prior to WWI, and pp. 321-326 for U.S. interests between the wars.

⁶DeNovo, p. 384.

⁷J.C. Hurewitz, Middle East Dilemmas (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1953), p. 106.

⁸Lloyd Griscom, Diplomatically Speaking: Memoirs of Constantinople and Persia (New York, 1940), p. 134, quoted in Thomas A. Bryson, Seeds of Mideast Crisis (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 1981), p. 4.

Beirut (AUB) was the educational institution that was known throughout the Middle East for its impact on its graduates and their accomplishments. Throughout the Middle East its graduates were prominent doctors, pharmacists, dentist, nurses, chemists, secretaries, accountants, teachers and public servants. The graduates of AUB were also known because an overwhelming majority of them seemed to take AUB's lessons of public service to heart and remained in their own countries, foregoing the temptation of possible higher salaries abroad.⁹

Since its founding in 1866 as Syrian Protestant College, AUB had a profound influence on the development of Arab nationalism. The Arab nationalist movement was a product of the Arab cultural revival which began in Lebanon in the late 19th century. The graduates of AUB and the cultural and intellectual environment which surrounded the university played a role in that movement. Albert Hourani described the contribution of AUB and the other missionary schools as follows:

The schools of Beirut helped to revive the Arabic language, and their graduates to give it a modern literature. Syrians and Lebanese were active in the secret societies of the period before 1914. They participated in the Anglo-Arab negotiations during the war of 1914-1918. They gave the movement its martyrs, executed by Jemal Pasha in 1915. They supplied

⁹See Bayard Dodge, The American University of Beirut (Beirut, 1956).

many of the officers and soldiers of the Arab army."¹⁰

America had another role in what George Antonius described as "a movement of ideas which, in a short lifetime, was to leap from literature to politics."¹¹ Emigration began after the violent disturbances in Lebanon in 1860. Initially, emigrants went to Egypt and the Sudan, where many found employment after British occupation in 1882. Emigration began to accelerate in the 1890's. Most of these emigrants were Christians who went to North and South America. Philip Hitti estimated that the population of Mount Lebanon decreased by one-fourth or 100,000 between 1900-1914.¹²

The obvious adverse consequence of Lebanon's loss of many of its youth soon began to be at least partially offset by the steady stream of remittances from successful relatives in the New World. Even more important than this increased prosperity were the ideas that returned to Lebanon from Lebanese writers from Cairo to New York. Literature, nationalism, and the perception of happiness in a more prosperous life deeply influenced the Lebanese image of the West, and of America in

¹⁰Albert Hourani, Syria and Lebanon (Oxford University Press, 1946). For the development of the Arab nationalist movement see George Antonius, Arab Awakening (London, 1938).

¹¹Antonius, p. 37.

¹²Philip Hitti, Lebanon in History 3rd Ed. (London: Macmillan, 1967), p.474.

particular.¹³

The Lebanese image of America was also enhanced by the brief entry of the U.S. after the First World War into the international politics of the Middle East. President Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points expressed the view that the non-Turkish areas of the Ottoman Empire should not be divided among the Allies. They should be assured "an absolutely unmolested opportunity of autonomous development," and avoid becoming what his adviser Colonel House termed "a breeding place for future war," as a result of the various secret Allied agreements.¹⁴

The King-Crane Commission was created in 1919 following President Wilson's suggestion that since the concept of a mandate had already been accepted by the Council of Four, an international commission made up of "the fittest men that could be obtained" should be sent to Syria in order to "elucidate the state of opinion and the soil to be worked on by any mandatory."¹⁵ President Howard Bliss of Syrian Protestant College played a major role in convincing Wilson

¹³Hourani, p. 55 and Hitti pp. 476-8.

¹⁴See chap. 31 in David Fromkin, A Peace to End All Peace (New York: Henry Holt, 1989), House quote is on p. 257 and from Charles Seymour, The Intimate Papers of Colonel House, Vol. 3 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1928), p. 45.

¹⁵Harry N. Howard, The King-Crane Commission (Beirut: Khayat, 1963), p. 32.

to support this idea.¹⁶ The commission eventually became only an American venture and made a six-week visit to Syria and Palestine in the summer of 1919 that heard the wishes of the native population concerning their political future. It recommended the formation of a united Syria consisting of Syria, Lebanon and Palestine under the constitutional rule of Prince Feisal ibn Hussein. Although the Commission's report was ignored, it represented "another step toward recognizing the self-determination of peoples as a guiding principle of international diplomacy."¹⁷

The United States quickly returned to isolationism with Wilson's inability to persuade the Senate to ratify his program, which included ratification of the Treaty of Versailles and membership in the League of Nations. The recommendations of the King-Crane Commission remained secret until 1922. The report was denounced by the British, French and Zionists. It was also termed a "criminal deception" by Gertrude Bell because it raised such false hopes among many Arabs.¹⁸ America's retreat from the mantle of international political responsibility which cloaked the intervention of the

¹⁶Robert L. Daniel, American Philanthropy in the Near East, 1820-1960 (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1970), p. 163.

¹⁷L. Carl Brown, International Politics and the Middle East (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), pp. 105, 249-50. For the detailed account see Howard.

¹⁸Paul C. Helmreich, From Paris to Sevres: The Partition of the Ottoman Empire at the Peace Conference of 1919-1920 (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1974), p.139, quoted in Fromkin, p. 397.

Great Powers into the Middle East did have certain benefits. It allowed the U.S. to avoid the Arab charge of betrayal that was attached to Great Britain due to its failure to keep its promises and the hatred that France had inspired due to its manner of administering the mandate in Lebanon and Syria. This hatred was largely due to the French use of military force during the eighteen revolts that its administration of the mandate aroused between 1919 and 1941.¹⁹

* * *

The United States retreated very quickly into isolationism despite the role it's military and economic might had established for it in the First World War as a major power. Yet, in rejecting President Woodrow Wilson's proposals, a foreign policy dilemma was created that would impact the nation's ability to change its policy and influence events at a later date.

In his 1939 Annual Report, American University of Beirut President Bayard Dodge would express a theme of the political and social transformations which had occurred since the end of First World War and observe that the Arab Middle East was "at the close of an era."²⁰ AUB had survived and prospered because of the leadership, shown by Dodge and other members of his family before him, which was able to react to societal

¹⁹Howard, p. 322.

²⁰Quoted in DeNovo, p. 318.

change in Lebanon and to changes in international political relationships. The American missionaries in Lebanon changed their focus from evangelizing Muslims to concentrating on Christians, and then to education with a mission of preparing the future leaders of Lebanon.

The evolution of American interests was matched by an even greater transformation in the environment in which U.S. diplomats operated in order to protect their interests. Even if these interests were not deemed as vital to the U.S. as those that motivated France and Great Britain, these cultural interests in Lebanon were officially recognized by the U.S. Government. In 1833 the United States appointed a British subject as honorary U.S. consular agent in Beirut. He was replaced in 1850 by an American with the salaried rank of consul. In 1906 the post was raised to a consulate-general.²¹

Throughout the interwar period American diplomats in Beirut continued to face the challenge of protecting U.S. cultural interests and the rights of U.S. citizens. The U.S. decision that "the price of power was more than Americans were yet willing to pay" made it difficult to protect U.S. interests.²² These interests exposed the U.S. to the growing power of Arab nationalism in Lebanon, yet forced the acceptance of France's position in Lebanon, as well as British hegemony over the Middle East as a whole.

²¹Hurewitz, p. 106.

²²DeNovo, p. 393.

Negotiating the extension of customs immunities to American religious and philanthropic institutions, and protecting the rights of U.S. citizens were the normal tasks of the interwar period. Paul Knabenshue, who served as U.S. Consul General in Beirut from 1919-1929, obtained an interim understanding with General Gouraud guaranteeing U.S. interests in the early days of French occupation in 1920. He also played a major role in the negotiation of the 1924 Franco-American agreement which guaranteed U.S. interests, and also gave the U.S. a consultative role in France's disposition of the mandate.

In the early days of the Syrian Rebellion in October-December 1925, Knabenshue opposed the views of the more prestigious U.S. Ambassador to France, Myron Herrick, and requested two U.S. destroyers to wait off Beirut.²³ Herrick, who had extensive experience in banking and railroads, was worried about offending French sensibilities. After much discussion, the Department of State supported Knabenshue.

Knabenshue requested the warships to remain offshore despite French protests in order to maintain the ability to evacuate U.S. nationals and to reassure the Lebanese. Knabenshue was also faced with the dilemma of having to negotiate with Druze rebels who had kidnapped the Dragoman at the U.S. Consulate in Damascus. The rebels threatened to

²³FRUS, 1925, vol. II, pp. 105-127.

kidnap the U.S. Consul and other Americans in order to demand ransom, attract international attention, and to force U.S. intervention to end the mandate.²⁴

Knabenshue had previously attracted the ire of the Department of State when he had relayed the requests of numerous Lebanese that the U.S. assume the mandate in Lebanon, and when he had later recommended U.S. support for British assumption of the mandate. He was summarily ordered to do nothing to encourage such discussion.

U.S. diplomats were witnessing in Beirut a gradual change in U.S. interests, in addition to the development of a nationalist consciousness. During the thirties, the construction of a small pipeline from Kirkuk in Iraq to Tripoli in Lebanon, by the British-operated Iraqi Petroleum Company became an omen of greater U.S. interest in the Middle East when Standard Oil Company of New Jersey and Socony-Vacuum Oil Company obtained a 23.75% interest in the company.²⁵

Knabenshue continued to report his estimate of the local situation. He concluded in the summer of 1927 that the French had not learned the major lesson of the 1925-6 rebellion:

[The new French policy is]...not going to bring satisfaction to the people here or settle the problem confronting the French in their exercise of the mandate in this area...the situation requires a mandatory power sincere and honest in its purpose and policy, with power to exercise

²⁴FRUS, 1926, vol. II, pp. 134-155.

²⁵David H. Finnie, Desert Enterprise (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958), pp. 14-15, 63-64.

absolutely direct administration at the outset, and with authority gradually to organize and establish local governmental institutions and gradually to entrust to them the administration of the country, and to withdraw when the solution of their racial and religious differences would be the development of a national consciousness, and when the administrative experience gained would permit them to stand alone.²⁶

The purpose of presenting some highlights from Knabenshue's ten years as the senior U.S. diplomat in Lebanon is to help put the American diplomatic role during the Second World War in its proper perspective. The French policy of "divide and rule" that was applied to the mandate from the beginning, was not designed to assist Lebanon and Syria on their path to independence.²⁷

Knabenshue witnessed a brutal French bombardment of Damascus, just as another U.S. diplomat would twenty years later. Then too, the French resorted to violence to suppress the forces of self-determination which had been encouraged by the ideas taught in American missionary schools and expressed by two wartime American presidents.

Until the coming of the Second World War, the reports of subsequent U.S. diplomats in Beirut were preoccupied with relatively minor consular matters. The French thought that they had learned the lessons of the Great Rebellion and maintained a large army of occupation. The Lebanese took

²⁶Knabenshue to the Secretary of State, No. 2467, August 6, 1927.

²⁷See Georges Catroux, Deux Missions en Moyen-Orient, (1919-1922) (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1958), p. 27.

advantage of both the American and French cultural and educational institutions that were available, and continued to work for self-determination.

* * *

As the Second World War approached, the cautiousness involved in the traditional American diplomatic policy of protecting U.S. interests in Lebanon began to clash with Wilson's ideology of self-determination, higher priority Allied war objectives, and the transformation of the U.S. into a great power, with the concurrent expansion of its interests in the region. In Beirut, American diplomats, besides benefiting from the goodwill of the population, recognized very quickly the changes in the local, as well as the international political scene, and used their initiative to influence U.S. policy.

CHAPTER TWO

FALL OF FRANCE, FEAR OF GERMANS, FINIS TO MANDATE?

L'administration du Mandat était changeante et versatile. Elle se caractérisait en outre par une indifférence quasi volontaire aux besoins véritables du Liban, surtout dans le domaine économique. De 1924 à 1939, le Liban eut au moins quatre formes différentes de gouvernement et autant d'organisations judiciaires.²⁸

On the eve of the Second World War Bishara al-Khuri, while travelling with a delegation in France that was seeking support for the 1936 Franco-Lebanese Treaty, sensed that something had changed in the aftermath of the nonaggression pact between Germany and the Soviet Union: "The European sky suddenly became gloomy in the middle of August [1939]...and there wasn't one among us who did not think of returning to his country."²⁹ At the same time as Khuri hurried home, Lebanese Minister for Public Works Camille Chamoun noted that in Lebanon "la vie allait son train," troubled only by petty local political problems and the intervention of the French authorities.³⁰

The Second World War made its debut in Lebanon with the decree of the French High Commissioner that virtually terminated any semblance of Lebanese participation in

²⁸Camille Chamoun, Crise au Moyen-Orient (Paris: Gallimard, 1963), p. 63.

²⁹Bishara al-Khuri, Haga'iq Lubnaniyah vol. 1 (Beirut: 1960), p. 236.

³⁰Chamoun, p. 91.

government. On 21 September 1939, Gabriel Puaux announced that he had suspended the Lebanese Constitution, dissolved Parliament, and established a government through a Secretary of State. Lebanese President Emile Edde was retained with the authority to issue decrees having the force of law only after their approval by the French High Commissioner.

This action by the French High Commissioner was typical of the cycle of French policies in Lebanon described in this chapter's opening quotation from Camille Chamoun and consistently reported over the years by American diplomats in Beirut.

American Consul General Eliot Palmer concluded his report to the State Department concerning these changes with the following comment:

The need for [governmental] reorganization is universally admitted, but the crisis in the international situation has merely hastened provisional action and made conclusive settlement more uncertain than ever.³¹

Gabriel Puaux's short term (January 1939-December 1940) as French High Commissioner came at a critical time in history. He is said to have ruined any chances for France to arrive at a negotiated settlement with Lebanese and Syrian nationalists for a permanent relationship with France that would replace the mandate.

³¹Palmer to Secretary of State, no. 359, 29 September 1939, U.S. Diplomatic Post Records, NARC.

According to Dutch historian Isaac Lipschits, Puaux's political tactics in the Levant were "bien choisie" to destroy any possibility of the ratification of the 1936 Franco-Lebanese and Franco-Syrian Treaties.³² These tactics lost France the support of many Lebanese who believed that Lebanon's future was inextricably tied to France, and especially that of Bishara al-Khuri. In 1936 Khuri had been President of the Lebanese Parliamentary Commission which had supported the treaty and said that it was:

le Code de notre Alliance et de notre Amitié
avec la France...le couronnement de notre passé
et la garantie de notre avenir...³³

Puaux's term as High Commissioner has been described by French diplomatic historian J.B. Duroselle as having "the essential characteristics of a proconsulate."³⁴ Bishara al-Khuri calls Puaux's actions "unconstitutional," and his government "para-military rule."³⁵ Khuri and Lipschits both attack Puaux's record in his previous position as French Minister to Austria during the Anschluss.

Khuri's sarcastic view of this "old diplomat" is supported by Puaux's own memoirs which state that in Lebanon

³²Isaac Lipschits, La Politique de la France au Levant, 1939-1941 (Paris: Editions A. Pedone, 1963), pp. 69-70.

³³Bishara al-Khuri in Edmond Rabbath, La Formation Historique du Liban Politique et Constitutionnel (Beirut, 1973), p. 416. See Rabbath, pp. 402-25 and Khuri, p. 316 for further discussion of the importance of the treaty.

³⁴Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, in introduction to Lipschits, p. 4.

³⁵Khuri, p. 236.

the mandate had never been discussed in a hostile manner. Puaux believed that all that was necessary in order to resolve Lebanon's problems was to "dépolitiser le Liban," by getting rid of parties and politicians, and that meant both Emile Eddé and Bishara al-Khuri.³⁶

Puaux eliminated all Lebanese political participation, except for Eddé, whom he described as a "vieux ami de la France...on le savait dans tout le Proche Orient," who played the role of a figurehead Lebanese President.³⁷ Puaux's decision allowed Eddé to discredit himself and played an important role in forming a bipartisan opposition in Lebanon that cut across confessional lines.

The reports of the U.S. diplomats in Beirut during this period were focused on the French mandatory authorities. There doesn't seem to be any indication at that time that they considered Puaux's rule as particularly oppressive or as representing any significant change in French policy. However, Palmer noted that the military was playing an increased role:

It is becoming increasingly apparent that General Weygand as Commander in Chief of French forces in the Eastern Mediterranean is a person to be reckoned with, not only

in military matters but also in administrative

³⁶Gabriel Puaux, Deux Années au Levant (Paris: Hachette, 1952), pp. 64-65.

³⁷Ibid., p. 65.

and other questions of local importance.³⁸

This observation proved important, as Puaux's obedience to General Weygand, a popular war hero and former French high Commissioner in Syria and Lebanon, was transferred to Weygand's successor, General Mittelhauser, and provide a convenient excuse for submission in June 1940. Submission to Vichy and insensitivity to the situation in Lebanon was probably inevitable from Puaux, who Bishara al-Khuri notes with irony, reported that all was calm in Vienna prior to Hitler's annexation of Austria with the apparent consent of the majority of the population.³⁹

Despite the impact that U.S. cultural interests in Lebanon had on the individual education and perhaps even the direction of many Arab nationalists, the primary concern of these institutions was in stability and in maintaining the status quo that allowed their continued operation. This is perhaps highlighted by American University of Beirut President Bayard Dodge only mentioning General Weygand and Gabriel Puaux, in his history of AUB, as calming influences on the local situation.⁴⁰ AUB and Dodge are the subject of three pages of compliments in Puaux's memoirs that stand in stark contrast to his criticisms of American intervention and "les

³⁸Palmer to Secretary of State, dated 29 Sep 1939, Subject: Suspension of Lebanese Constitution, U.S. Diplomatic Post Records, NARC.

³⁹Khuri, p. 237.

⁴⁰Dodge, pp. 68-70.

préjugés anticolonialistes du président Wilson."⁴¹

Puaux declared that despite the fact that AUB's classes were in English, and that several of its alumni were prominent Arab nationalists, AUB was neither an "entreprise au service de la politique britannique," nor a "foyer d'arabisme."⁴² The tributes expressed by Puaux toward an educational institution established by American Protestant missionaries are surprising in light of French suspicions of American influence in Lebanon since the heady days of 1919 when the King-Crane Commission received overwhelming support for an American Mandate in Lebanon.⁴³

Puaux further praises AUB's president for avoiding involvement in local politics. Puaux describes "Monsieur Bliss" as "un homme de grande culture" who invited him many times to participate in discussions and social events at AUB.⁴⁴

Bayard Dodge, AUB's president since 1923, was successful in winning the support of the French High Commissioner and thereby ensured his institution's survival during a time when French authorities could have easily closed it in the name of security. Puaux's confusion of Dodge's name with that of his well-known father-in-law gives credence to Puaux's critics.

⁴¹Puaux, pp. 11-12.

⁴²Ibid, p. 107.

⁴³Palmer to Secretary of State, telegram no. 181, 17 Jan 1939, U.S. Diplomatic Post Records, NARC.

⁴⁴Puaux, p. 107.

The relationship that American cultural interests and diplomatic representatives had with the ruling authorities in Lebanon were much different after Gabriel Puaux. The upcoming events in Lebanon would test their knowledge of Lebanon and their ability to quickly adapt to its changing political environment, as well as to changing international political relationships.

* * *

France's failure to ratify the 1936 Franco-Lebanese Treaty was the first step in the rupture between France and Lebanon. The next step was the surrender of France to Germany on 22 June 1940. The Lebanese perception of France was unavoidably altered by this event.

The spectacle of French conscripts dancing with joy in streets of Beirut because they could now return home also convinced many Lebanese that there was a need for change. Lebanon knew well from long experience that military defeat and the prospect of foreign military occupation was not a reason for celebration. Camille Chamoun wrote that the sight of Frenchmen celebrating their nation's defeat was a tragic contrast to the Lebanese feeling that a catastrophe had occurred: "une catastrophe sans précédent dans l'histoire; catastrophe militaire, politique et morale."⁴⁵

Franco-American relations were also, perhaps

⁴⁵Chamoun, p. 94.

unnecessarily, changed forever. France would remember the U.S. unwillingness and inability to provide military assistance as the German tanks rolled toward Paris. For America, the myths of General La Fayette and a hundred and fifty years of Franco-American cooperation would be tainted by the image of France's defeat.

President Roosevelt's already "condescending view of France" was reinforced by his image of the French military and moral collapse before the armies of fascism, and stood in stark contrast to the brave speeches that Churchill was making from behind the English Channel.⁴⁶

Roosevelt's understanding of the events surrounding the Fall of France was distorted for several reasons, and these impacted greatly on U.S. policy. Roosevelt did not really understand that it was tactical and technical deficiencies, more than any other weaknesses, that had caused the French defeat. Furthermore, both the U.S. and Britain shared these deficiencies with France, but fortunately did not share her proximity to Germany.

Churchill had the advantage of being able to visit the battlefields in France, witness the German onslaught, and to observe the debates of the French cabinet. He also had a liaison officer with the French Cabinet who provided him with

⁴⁶See Milton Viorst, Hostile Allies: FDR and Charles De Gaulle (New York: Macmillan, 1965), or for more of the French view: Raoul Aglion, Roosevelt and De Gaulle: Allies in Conflict (New York: The Free Press, 1988)

regular reports.

General Edward Spears was Churchill's personal representative to the French cabinet and his friend. He had served as a liaison officer to the French throughout the First World War. He was well-liked and respected because of his performance during the previous war, his fluent knowledge of French, and his support for his former allies as a Member of Parliament between wars. His wife was the author, Mary Borden, who had raised an ambulance unit that served in France during the First World War, and did the same during the Second World War.

Roosevelt was hindered by more than being thousands of miles away from the events of May-June 1940. His trusted Ambassador to France, William Bullitt, had not accompanied the French Government when it left Paris. Bullitt, instead of being at French Premier Reynaud's side as the arguments over continued resistance took place, was sitting in his office in Paris:

...indulging his romantic nature, confident that he alone could save the city from the Germanic brutes and Parisian rabble...join[ing] the tradition of American ambassadors who--during the Revolution, the Commune and First War--assumed guardianship of the French capital.⁴⁷

Roosevelt had no witnesses to Marshall Pétain's and General Weygand's surrender to defeatism and their willingness to surrender. He did not know of De Gaulle's

⁴⁷Viorst, p. 19.

heroism and successful attacks as an Armored Division Commander, nor would he know firsthand of De Gaulle's attempts as a minister of the Reynaud Government to rally that government to continue the fight to Brittany or to the French Empire.

* * *

The American Legation in Beirut adapted quickly to the reality of the Fall of France and the establishment of the new government in Vichy. The initial willingness of French mandatory authorities in Lebanon to carry on the fight quickly evaporated. According to Puaux the Levant was forced by the inaction of General Nogues, the French Resident General in Morocco, to accede to Vichy control.⁴⁸ According to the U.S. Consul General in Tangiers, General Nogues told him it was the refusal of French forces in the Levant to continue resistance, that caused French North Africa to follow Vichy.⁴⁹ Regardless, General Weygand sent personal emissaries to the Levant, and those who encouraged resistance were imprisoned.

Close ties remained between American representatives and the French, but in July 1940 the American and British Consul Generals in Beirut began meeting each other regularly on the

⁴⁸Puaux, pp. 202-5.

⁴⁹J. Rives Childs, Foreign Service Farewell, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1969), p. 118.

beach for long walks.⁵⁰ Prior to the signing of the Destroyers-for-Bases Deal in September 1940, the Lend-Lease Act in March 1941, and America's Declaration of War in December 1941, there was an early recognition in Lebanon of common interests and the beginning of what would be called the Special Relationship.⁵¹

On 2 July 1940, the British Government declared that they would not allow either Syria or Lebanon to be occupied by a foreign power, used as base for attacking other countries, or to constitute a danger to those countries.

In May 1941 German aircraft refueled at Syrian airfields on their way to attack British troops in Iraq. Weapons were also transported from Syria and Lebanon to the Iraqi troops supporting the coup of Rashid Ali al-Gailani. On 8 June 1941, one week following the end of hostilities in Iraq, British and Free French invaded Syria and Lebanon.

The United States played a small, but important role in the desperate decisions that Great Britain made from January to July 1941. This role was played by the U.S. diplomats in Beirut who provided important information and interpretations of the events that were occurring in Lebanon, and throughout

⁵⁰Palmer, memorandum, 18 Jul 1940, Subject: Outline of a conversation with Mr. Havard (British Consul General), U.S. Diplomatic Post Records, NARC.

⁵¹See David Reynolds, "Roosevelt, Churchill, and the Wartime Anglo-American Alliance, 1939-1945: Towards a New Synthesis," in Wm. Roger Louis and Hedley Bull (eds.), The Special Relationship, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986).

the Middle East.

The American Legation in Beirut was committed to assisting Great Britain to answer the critical questions which might decide the war, or at least might determine the political future of Lebanon such as: What were German intentions in the Arab East? How would the Vichy French government in the Levant react to German requests for assistance, or to a German invasion? What was the Arab response to Germany's success on the battlefield, and what would be their response to German intervention in the Levant? What should the British response be towards a possible Axis threat to the Levant? Who should rule the Levant after an Allied invasion?

* * *

The Second World War suddenly brought a renewed importance to the Middle East as Arnold Toynbee notes in his introduction to Kirk's The Middle East in the War:

In an age in which the Middle East had long since ceased to be the most civilized and populous region in the Old World, it had regained its ancient central position in another way...The fall of France and intervention of Italy in the war in the summer of 1940 immediately enhanced the importance of the Middle East theatre, and from then on it remained the crucial theatre until the completion of the expulsion of the Axis forces from North Africa carried the war back on to the soil of continental Europe from Tunisia via Sicily.⁵²

U.S. diplomats in Beirut, in following Roosevelt's

⁵²Arnold Toynbee, introduction to George Kirk, The Middle East in the War (London: Oxford University Press, 1952), p. 1.

instructions to provide Great Britain all possible assistance short of war, were preoccupied with determining German and Italian intentions and with Vichy France's willingness to accommodate them. General dissatisfaction with French rule was reported, but the suspension of parliament and overt political activities had resulted in a marked decline in reporting on Lebanese affairs.

The American legation appeared to realize that this was a shortcoming. Palmer used George Antonius, the author of the recently published The Arab Awakening, as a source for his reports on Arab nationalism.⁵³ The President of the American University of Beirut, Bayard Dodge, and the President of the American College in Aleppo, Alford Carleton, were used more frequently to sound out Lebanese opinion.

Following many unsuccessful Free-French and British attempts to win him over to the allied cause, Gabriel Puaux was replaced as French High Commissioner on 24 November 1940 by Jean Chiappe, a former Paris police chief who had been relieved of his post in 1934 because of his right-wing sentiments. Puaux went to Tunisia and joined the forces of Free France in November 1942, after the American landings in North Africa. De Gaulle forgave his prior hesitation, and he served again as a French diplomat.

The new French Foreign Minister, Pierre Laval, announced

⁵³Palmer to Secretary of State, no. 612, 26 Sep 1940, Subject: Arab Federation, U.S. Diplomatic Post Records, NARC.

to the German Ambassador to France, Otto Abetz, that: "Je vais envoyer Chiappe en Syrie...je lui fais toute confiance pour opposer aux Anglais une vigoureuse résistance."⁵⁴ However, Chiappe's plane disappeared after flying too close to an Anglo-Italian naval battle between Marseille and Tunis. Chiappe's replacement was General Henri-Fernand Dentz, who was named High Commissioner by Pétain on 3 December 1940.⁵⁵

The following month brought the arrival in Beirut of Cornelius van Engert, the new Consul General of the United States, and in Damascus of Otto von Hentig, the chief of the division of the German Foreign Ministry that dealt with Near Eastern affairs.

Otto von Hentig was termed the "German's Colonel Lawrence of Persia during the last war" by Paul Knabenshue, who in 1941 was serving as U.S. Minister Resident in Iraq.⁵⁶ Von Hentig was one of the leaders of German-Turkish mission that crossed Iran to Afghanistan in 1915 with the mission of inducing the Emir of Afghanistan to take up arms against the British.⁵⁷ Von Hentig was sent to Syria on an informational mission in order to "provide the leaders of Germany with the information

⁵⁴Michel-Christian Davet, La Double Affaire de Syrie (Paris: Fayard, 1967), pp. 32-3.

⁵⁵Ibid, p. 52.

⁵⁶Knabenshue to Secretary of State, telegram no. 215, 28 Jul 1941, FRUS, 1941, vol. III, p. 384.

⁵⁷George Lenczowski, The Middle East in World Affairs 4th ed. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), pp. 56-7.

required to formulate their policy towards the Arab countries."⁵⁸

Dentz had commanded a corps in Alsace in the spring of 1940. On 2 June General Weygand gave him command of the Military Region of Paris, with the mission of turning the city over to the Germans. He was entrusted this mission by Weygand, whom he had served as intelligence chief when Weygand was High Commissioner in 1923.⁵⁹

According to General Georges Catroux, his successor in 1926 as head of the Bureau des Renseignements for the Levant, Dentz also had the dubious distinction of starting the Syrian Rebellion in 1925. He was the officer who supposedly suggested to General Sarrail that he use the ruse of inviting three leading Druze chieftains to meet with the High Commissioner in order to arrest them. As Howard Sachar notes, if this story was true, it indeed made Dentz an "interesting choice" as High Commissioner.⁶⁰

Catroux ironically also served as Dentz's successor as High Commissioner in July 1941. In 1944, Dentz was arrested, tried, and sentenced to death for his collaboration with

⁵⁸From captured German documents quoted in Lukasz Hirszowicz, The Third Reich and the Arab East (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966), p. 113.

⁵⁹For details and a sympathetic view of Dentz, see Andre Laffargue, Le General Dentz: Paris 1940-Syrie 1941 (Paris: Les Iles d'Or, n.d).

⁶⁰Catroux, p. 68. Kirk, p. 86 indicates there is some doubt as to Dentz's role in this episode.

Germans in Syria and Lebanon in May 1941. His sentence was later commuted to life imprisonment. He died in prison in France in 1945.

Engert was an experienced diplomat whose first assignment was as a student interpreter in Turkey in 1912. He came directly from serving three years in Iran, where he had witnessed the increase of German presence and influence. He was also probably very aware of Von Hentig's experiences during the First World War. Engert had also previously served in Syria in 1916-1917.⁶¹ He was to serve as U.S. Consul General in Beirut until June 1942.

The U.S. Legation in Beirut served as additional eyes and ears for Britain during the first five months of 1941. Engert was committed to the idea that the United States had a vital interest in Great Britain winning the war. He had been watching the Germans closely for years, and had "no illusions as to the true nature of their intentions."⁶²

* * *

Von Hentig spent a month traveling extensively in Syria and Lebanon, and meeting many Arab leaders. His orders were to avoid doing anything which might be interpreted as being against the French mandatory authorities. However, "the very appearance of a German emissary at a time when the Arabs

⁶¹Register of the Department of State (Washington: GPO, 1924), p. 123.

⁶²Engert to Secretary of State, telegram no. 105, 9 April 1941, FRUS, 1941, vol. III, p. 696.

impatiently awaited some kind of change was enough to arouse hopes of an anti-French solution..."⁶³ Engert described his efforts to recruit Syrians to his cause as "prodigious."⁶⁴

In March 1941 after Von Hentig's departure, riots broke out in Aleppo, Beirut, Damascus, Hama, and Homs in which Engert reported that about 17 people were killed. Martial law and travel restrictions were enacted in all the affected cities except Beirut. Engert reported that although the rioting was "ostensibly as protest against [the] rise in the price in the price of bread...", it was General Dentz's belief that all the recent disturbances were the result of recent German activities.⁶⁵

Engert appeared to have actively sought out Lebanese and Syrian Nationalists who were opposing the French, as well as those who were cooperating with them. His report of 9 April 1941 offers interesting views of the situation in the Levant. It also explains some of Engert's future actions, as well as U.S. policy in Lebanon during the period in which he was the ranking American diplomat in Lebanon and Syria.

Engert's report stated: "There is not the slightest doubt

⁶³Hirszowicz, p. 113-114.

⁶⁴Engert to Secretary of State, telegram no. 34, 12 Feb 1941, FRUS, 1941, vol. III, p. 675.

⁶⁵Engert to Secretary of State, telegram no. 61, 6 Mar 1941, FRUS, 1941, vol. III, pp. 689-90.

in my mind that the recent disturbances in Syria and Beirut were engineered by Germans with the active and particularly official support of the Iraqi Government."⁶⁶ Engert's report also included a conversation with Shukri al-Quwatli, who had recently emerged as the leader of the National Bloc, the Syrian national independence movement.

Engert's failure to attribute these disturbances of February-April 1941 to any local economic causes is initially very peculiar. The deteriorating economic situation that existed at the time in Lebanon and Syria is well documented. Albert Hourani, writing only a few years after the event, explains the demonstrations and strikes as a "protest against the dearth of essential foodstuffs and the failure of the authorities to stop profiteering."⁶⁷

Philip Khoury details both massive unemployment, scarcity of basic commodities and the inefficiency of the French government as reasons for disturbances. A strike of shopkeepers, ordered by Shukri al-Quwatli, that started in Damascus and soon spread around the countryside, was the action that resulted in General Dentz's decision to implement some governmental reforms. The source for Khoury's comments are the reports from the same time of Gardener, the British

⁶⁶Engert to Secretary of State, telegram no. 105, 9 April 1941, FRUS, 1941, vol. III, p. 695.

⁶⁷Hourani, p. 235.

Consul General in Damascus.⁶⁸

Engert's reports to the State Department show clearly that he was neither ignorant of the conditions in the Levant, nor against the movements for national independence for Syria and Lebanon. Based upon his observations of the Axis powers, Engert was simply convinced that they represented a threat to the United States and democracy. In his view, both self-determination for the people of Syria and Lebanon, and the protection of traditional French interests in the Eastern Mediterranean were dependent on Britain winning the war.

In the same report of 9 April 1941 which is mentioned above, he relayed a conversation with Shukri al-Quwatli, in which Quwatli assured him that his party was not pro-German, but that Germany was the only nation to officially commit to Syrian independence and an Arab confederation. Quwatli urged that the British, preferably in consultation with the Americans, should make official promises in order to counter the Germans.

Engert countered that Britain and the U.S. took their promises seriously and didn't make "extravagant" ones. He continued in that cable to offer a chilling description that he seemed to apply to most Arab nationalist leaders:

I came away with the uneasy feeling that--unlike the irresponsible groups of excitable young men whose emotional rhetoric need not be taken seriously--these mature men did not regard the

⁶⁸Philip Khoury, Syria and the French Mandate (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), p. 593.

European war as a calamity for the simple reason that like Stalin they hoped it would still further lower the prestige and reduce the power of the West as a whole. With their narrow nationalistic outlook they seemed only very dimly conscious of the great moral issues at stake and were merely wondering from which side of the ideological fence they could expect most by political support for their vague ambitions for the future.⁶⁹

Engert also took the direct approach in determining General Dentz's willingness to make and accede to concessions to Germany. In his first talk with the French High Commissioner in January 1941, he extracted from Dentz a statement that "...the mission which had been entrusted to him was primarily to keep Syria out of the war but [also] to defend it against anybody who attacked it."⁷⁰

Engert clearly understood that it was inevitable that the Germans would ask and then probably demand cooperation from the French Administration in Beirut. From the moment he arrived in Beirut he attempted to determine how General Dentz would react to requests for collaboration. He also warned Washington, and thereby London, of the very large possibility of overt German military intervention in the Levant.

Very conscious of the dire military situation that existed in April 1941, Engert recommended that:

It would be folly to permit portions of it [the Middle East] to submit tamely to Axis blackmail, flattery or coercion and thereby endanger the safety of the whole. A form of tacit informal

⁶⁹FRUS, 1941, vol III, p. 696.

⁷⁰Engert to Secretary of State, telegram no. 14, FRUS, 1941, vol. III, p. 687.

and purely local Anglo-French understanding in the event of an attack on Syria is therefore imperative if the Axis is to be kept out of the Middle East.⁷¹

Engert's efforts to achieve an Anglo-French understanding would come to naught. By the end of April 1941, Engert's cables transmitted in no uncertain terms his belief that General Dentz would accede to all orders from Vichy to provide assistance, including the use of air bases to Germany, and would probably not resist a German invasion.⁷²

The events which served as the impetus for the Anglo-French invasion of Lebanon and Syria centered around the coup that was launched in Iraq on 1 April 1941. This coup, which "from an international standpoint, was no more than a peripheral incident in the Second World War, with a purely fortuitous pro-German coloring," was interpreted as proof of the German intention to threaten Egypt from the east.⁷³

The coup was led by four Colonels of the Iraqi Army who used ex-Prime Minister Rashid Ali al-Gailani as a decorative spokesman. It was "essentially an initiative of the military and pan-Arab inclined component of the Sunni middle class."⁷⁴

⁷¹Engert to Secretary of State, telegram no. 112, 21 Apr 1941, FRUS, 1941, vol. III, p. 698.

⁷²Engert to Secretary of State, telegram no. 112, 30 Apr 1941, FRUS, 1941, vol. III, p. 700.

⁷³Hanna Batatu, The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), p. 451.

⁷⁴Ibid, p. 205.

However, there is no dispute that these officers had the Mufti of Jerusalem, Hajj Amin al-Husaini, as their mentor, that they were anti-British, and that they requested support from the Germans, Italians, Japanese, and the Soviets.⁷⁵

Germany agreed with hesitation to provide support to Iraq. Germany immediately opened negotiations with Vichy concerning Franco-German military cooperation on 3 May 1941. Admiral Darlan agreed to an agreement with Germany on 6 May 1941. This agreement was called the Paris Protocol and obligated France to:

(1)turn over to Iraq about three-quarters of the war materials stored in Syria; (2)agree to the landing of German and Italian planes, provide them with fuel and make available to the Luftwaffe a special base at Aleppo; (3)permit the use of ports, roads and railways for transports to Iraq; (4)train in Syria Iraqi soldiers equipped with French arms; (5)make available to the OKW all information on British strength and plans in the Middle East in the possession of French intelligence; (6)defend Syria and Lebanon with all available forces.⁷⁶

On 6 May 1941, the British forces in Iraq attacked the Iraqis who were massing around the British air base at Habbaniyah. Within days German combat and transport aircraft landed in the Levant in order to load up with fuel, ordinance, and equipment to take to Iraq. Britain had to intervene militarily in Iraq and in the Levant in order to stop the spread of German influence in the Middle East which could

⁷⁵See Batatu p. 451-457, and Hirszwicz chapters 5-7.

⁷⁶Hirszwicz, p. 161.

jeopardize the Suez Canal, the Iraqi oil fields, and ultimately Britain's links to the rest of the empire.

Some fifty years later, and with the benefit of historical hindsight, it is easy to dismiss the threat that Germany posed to Britain in the Mediterranean Theater in 1941. It is known now that Hitler was committed to the invasion of the Soviet Union, which began on 22 June 1941, at least since 18 December 1940, when the final plan was approved.

Germany only had one airborne division and it suffered such heavy casualties in Crete that Germany would not conduct any more large-scale airborne operations for the rest of the war. Moreover, Rommel faced such severe limitations of men and material that the possibility of his capturing Egypt was very unlikely.⁷⁷ Notwithstanding, in April and May of 1941, most Allied leaders had a far different perspective. Churchill, who later claimed to have known Hitler's intentions since the end of March 1941, evidently took pains not to share this knowledge with his subordinates, nor to betray it by his actions.⁷⁸

* * *

Anthony Eden, then British Minister of War, described April-May 1941 as the "days when Hitler's friends in every

⁷⁷For the strategic implications of the 1941 campaigns in Iraq and Syria, see the Epilogue of Geoffrey Warner, Iraq and Syria, 1941 (London: Davis-Poynter, 1974).

⁷⁸Winston Churchill, The Second World War, vol. III (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1950). p. 354. See Chapter 18 for the events surrounding the invasion of Lebanon and Syria.

part of the world had cause to be in a buoyant mood..."⁷⁹

As the chronology of events demonstrates, Great Britain was suffering reverses in Greece, Yugoslavia, Iraq, Crete and in the Western Desert.

Even today the facts concerning the Anglo-Free French invasion of Lebanon and Syria are colored by the acrimony between those who fought for Free France and those who fought for Vichy, as well as the enmity that all Frenchmen associated with the Levant seemed to feel towards Great Britain for ousting them from the Levant four years later.

The decision to invade Lebanon and Syria was initially opposed by General Wavell, the British Commander-in-Chief in the Middle East.⁸⁰ Wavell was thwarted by an impromptu coalition that included the British Ambassador to Egypt, the RAF Commander-in-Chief of the Middle East, the Free French, and the British Representative to the Free French, General Spears.

Wavell's reasons seem militarily sound. Great Britain left 11,000 men and a large amount of equipment in Greece. Over 18,000 would soon be lost in Crete, and Rommel's offensive in the Western Desert had just crossed the Libyan-Egyptian border. His recommendation that Britain negotiate

⁷⁹Anthony Eden, The Reckoning (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), p.280.

⁸⁰Winston Churchill, The Second World War, vol. III, pp. 321-26.

with the Rashid Ali government in Iraq fell on deaf ears.

The British official history of the war states that Churchill's letter to Wavell on 21 May 1941 related that Churchill's decision to invade Syria and Lebanon was not due to General De Gaulle's or General Spears' personal representations.⁸¹ However, that history does not mention that De Gaulle and Spears were not the only ones questioning the judgement of the British Commander-in-Chief in the Middle East.

Lampson disagreed with Wavell's positions concerning Iraq and Syria in conferences and in his cables to the Foreign Office on 5 May and 18 May 1941, despite the critical situation for Britain throughout the theater.⁸² When Churchill finally ordered the operation, Lampson objected to Wavell's transfer of troops from Egypt saying that the invasion of Syria and Iraq should "not occur at the expense of [Egypt's] western flank."⁸³ Lampson's inconsistency is indicative of the political considerations which affected British military actions.

Politics was not limited to the Free French nor British diplomats. Air Marshall Tedder, who succeeded Arthur Longmore

⁸¹I.S.O. Playfair et al., The Mediterranean and Middle East, vol. II (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1956), p. 202.

⁸²Trefor E. Evans (ed.), The Killearn Diaries, 1934-1946, (London: Siggwick and Jackson, 1972), pp. 168-9, 171-3.

⁸³Ibid, p. 175.

as RAF Commander-in-Chief on 3 May 1941, felt it necessary to send a message to Air Marshall Portal, the Chief of the Air Staff, following a meeting on 19 May 1941 with Wavell and General Georges Catroux, the Commander of the Free French Forces in the Middle East.⁸⁴ Tedder was understandably worried about German access to air bases in Syria and Lebanon. Tedder's predecessor was evidently fired because of the Army's frequent complaints about the lack of air superiority in the Mediterranean and Middle East, and because of his own frequent messages to London requesting more new aircraft.

Tedder's message to Portal complained of the Army's tendency to "proceed methodically and unimaginatively along approved text book lines, thereby missing opportunities which can only be seized if one is prepared to take chances."⁸⁵ According to Tedder, Portal responded with his own criticism of the Army, saying:

...the Army regarded German infiltration into Syria and Iraq as an unpleasant subject to be ignored, and reference to it by the Chiefs of Staff was considered an attempt to thrust a puking infant into the unwilling arms of busy men concerned with Africa.⁸⁶

The British decision to invade was finally based on the Vichy French decision to cooperate militarily with the Germans. Much of the information that the British had of

⁸⁴Lord Tedder, With Prejudice (London: Cassell, 1966), pp. 92-4.

⁸⁵Ibid, p. 93.

⁸⁶Ibid, p. 94.

these events was based on the reports of U.S. diplomats in Beirut and in Vichy. The United States represented Great Britain at Vichy and provided intelligence on Vichy's inner workings.⁸⁷ The significance of Engert's reporting from Beirut was heightened by the political infighting among the various British interests and the Free French. Ultimately, Engert even became officially responsible for British interests on 23 May 1941, following the internment of British diplomats.

The Syrian campaign itself is described in detail in the official British military histories. One version offers a rather romantic description of the military operations in Lebanon and Syria:

Distasteful as the whole Syrian affair was in some ways, it may perhaps be remembered as one of the last of the picturesque campaigns: men of the commando among the orange groves on the Litani bank; the charge on horseback of French Spahis; our Indian soldiers besieged in the house at Mezze; English yeomanry and Essex lads fighting among the fallen pillars of ancient Palmyra; picturesque battlemented forts frowning defiance across the eastern desert; young Australians in bright moonlight creeping stealthily down the ravine of the Damour to be greeted by the growl of French watchdogs on the river's brink...⁸⁸

This description belies a bloody campaign in which British casualties were about 3,300, Free French were about 1,300, and Vichy losses were over 6,000 of whom 1,000 were

⁸⁷See reports from Admiral Leahy, U.S. Ambassador to France, FRUS, 1941, vol. III, pp. 701-3, 709-11.

⁸⁸Christopher Buckley, Five Ventures (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1954), p. 135.

killed. Hostilities would last from 8 June until 12 July.⁸⁹ The armistice agreement would be signed at St. Jean D'Acre on 14 July 1941.

The period of April to July 1941 proved to be eventful for the U.S. Legation in Beirut. American Consul General Cornelius van Engert would play some rather extraordinary roles for an envoy whose country was still officially neutral.

Engert's reports of his meetings with Dentz and his observations of the increasing Axis presence in the Levant, as well as his interpretations of its impact on the native population evidently played a large role in fanning British fears of German intervention in Syria and Lebanon. Hirszowicz claims that:

The fear of German domination of Syria and Lebanon was heightened by the information of Van Engert, the U.S. Consul-General at Beirut. This anxiety was the main cause of operation 'Exporter' launched by the British and Free French troops on June 8th.⁹⁰

As expected, none of the British official histories mention Engert's reporting. Their versions of the reporting of Godfrey Havard, the British Consul General in Beirut, are very similar to Engert's reports. A perspective of the cooperation between Engert and Havard is given by an interesting telegram on 13 May 1941 from Frederick Winant, the U.S. Ambassador in the United Kingdom, which includes a letter from the British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs that

⁸⁹Playfair, p. 222.

⁹⁰Hirszowicz, p. 176.

stated:

full No doubt the State Department are receiving
 information [of] all these developments [German
 activities in Syria] from Mr. Engert, your Consul
 General at Beirut, and are already considering what
 can be done. I would, however, suggest that
 immediate action at Vichy, and perhaps also by Mr.
 Engert, might be very useful.⁹¹

There are indications that Engert's views were also being used by the Free French to further their aims. Spears, who considered Engert "one of the best friends that Britain ever had," refers disparagingly in his memoirs on three occasions to Havard.⁹² Spears evidently disliked Havard because of his failure to provide unequivocally early support for an Anglo-Free French invasion. In Spears' eyes this was due to Havard's "French wife," and because he "was very well treated by General Dentz."⁹³

Engert provided detailed sightings of German aircraft and personnel in the Levant. Hirszowicz's belief in the impact of Engert's reports is largely based on the meeting he had in Jerusalem shortly before the invasion with the Allied commander, General Henry Wilson, whom he furnished with an eye-witness account of German activity in the Levant, as well as the French reaction. Wilson states in his memoirs that he was "very much impressed with his [Engert's] clarity of vision

⁹¹FRUS, 1941, vol. III, pp. 703-705.

⁹²Spears, p. 122.

⁹³Ibid, pp. 26, 123, and 126.

on the trend of French opinion [towards collaboration with the Germans]."⁹⁴

During the hostilities Engert served as a de facto referee between the forces in combat, relaying both sides' reports of violations of the rules of war. He was a point of contact for the civilian victims of collateral damage. Finally, he served as the intermediary who transmitted proposals for a cessation of hostilities between the warring parties.

* * *

The Treaty of Acre signified the beginning of a new stage in Lebanon's struggle for independence, as well as a new diplomatic role for the United States of America. For the Lebanese seeking self-determination, British military occupation became what Philip Khoury describes as "the catalyst for independence." Khoury further describes the concurrent existence of Free French civil administration as an opportunity for Lebanese nationalists to accelerate the pace of change by "playing one against the other."⁹⁵

The United States emerged from the Syrian Campaign with increased prestige. Engert's role in attempting to minimize civilian damage and casualties was widely reported. The AUB

⁹⁴Henry Wilson, Eight Years Overseas, 1939-1947 (London: Hutchinson, 1950), pp. 109-10.

⁹⁵See Khoury's Chapter 23, entitled 'Playing One Against the Other.'

hospital cared for civilian, as well military casualties on both sides. The American Red Cross sent an emergency shipment of food to the Levant, which was initially stored on the AUB campus.⁹⁶

The American Legation continued in its new roles as mediator between the British and French (except now with a slightly different group of Frenchmen), and as a potential new patron for the Lebanese who could possibly shield them from both the figurative and literal bombardments of the British and the French.

U.S. mediation was quickly requested. Less than two weeks after the signature of the Treaty of St. Jean d'Acre, General De Gaulle asked Engert to call on him. De Gaulle expressed his concern about the failure of "some of the British military authorities in the Middle East" to understand "the rights of France in the Levant."⁹⁷

According to Engert, De Gaulle responded to his assertion that now "everybody was agreed that Syria and the Lebanon were entitled to independence," with a vague statement that "it might prove practicable to postpone indefinitely the implementation of certain political promises which had been made to the natives."⁹⁸

⁹⁶Dodge, pp. 76-7.

⁹⁷Engert to Secretary of State, telegram no. 313, 27 July 1941, FRUS, 1941, vol. III, pp. 778-9.

⁹⁸Ibid, pp. 779-80.

Engert's response in this meeting was to insist that neither Free France's relations with the British, nor with the Lebanese should impede the military effort of the Allies. Engert stated that these problems "should temporarily be relegated to the background and that irrevocable commitments should as much as possible be avoided before the successful conclusion of the war."⁹⁹

It is not clear whether Engert understood on 25 July 1941 the extent of the rupture which already existed between the British and the Free French as a result of the Treaty of St. Jean D'Acre.¹⁰⁰ The exchange of correspondence between De Gaulle and Oliver Lyttelton, British Minister of State, representing the British War Cabinet in the Middle East, between 21 to 27 July resulted in an agreement which should have ended for the duration of the war the disagreements between the two Allies over the future of the Levant.

Bishara al-Khuri noted that the British and the French each had different goals and opinions concerning Lebanese domestic politics. The demands of the Lebanese nationalists at this time were simply to return to constitutional rule, to conduct free parliamentary elections, and to have a

⁹⁹Ibid., p. 780.

¹⁰⁰For the details surrounding the Treaty of St. Jean d'Acre see: De Gaulle, pp. 189-190, 193-5; Catroux, pp. 148-64; Spears, pp. 123-47; Wilson, pp. 118-20; Harvey, p. 19; and Killearn, pp. 182, 186-7. It is interesting to note Churchill makes no reference to it in his memoirs, and Eden's only comment is to complain about De Gaulle during that period.

presidential election by the assembly in accordance with the Lebanese Constitution.¹⁰¹

On 8 June 1941, General Catroux issued a proclamation in the name of General De Gaulle and Free France abolishing the mandate and granting immediate independence to Lebanon and Syria subject to a formal treaty which established their relationship with France.¹⁰²

Catroux issued on 26 November 1941 a formal proclamation of Lebanese independence that A.B. Gaunson terms "a masterpiece of euphemism."¹⁰³ He completely avoided the issue of treaty negotiations. He retained Alfred Naccache as President. He did not restore constitutional rule. He did not shift any power back to the Lebanese.

In his memoirs Bishara al-Khuri refers to Naccache derisively as the man "who was appointed by General Dentz."¹⁰⁴ He states that the Lebanese nationalists knew that a collision with the French was inevitable. Despite the concessions that were being made by Catroux and others on a social level, they understood that the French would do all they could to delay

¹⁰¹Khuri, vol. I, p. 241.

¹⁰²Catroux, pp. 137-8.

¹⁰³A.B. Gaunson, The Anglo-French Clash in Lebanon and Syria, 1940-45 (Hong Kong: Macmillan Press, 1987), p. 80.

¹⁰⁴Khuri, p. 240.

a return to constitutional rule.¹⁰⁵

Unlike Khuri, at this point the U.S. Department of State was clearly confused as to whether or not the British and Free French had abolished the mandate. The Department noted that according to Engert's reports, General Spears shared their uncertainty, but that "the opposition he expresses to the continuation of the mandate does not appear to be felt, however, by his government."¹⁰⁶

Engert did not share Spears' uncertainty as to French intentions, be they Free French or Vichy French. He reported widespread Lebanese disappointment with Catroux's actions, and that a large contingent of influential Lebanese came to see him to voice their dissatisfaction. However, Engert counseled these Lebanese to have "great prudence and patience and above all [take] no action that might render the prosecution of the war by the Allies more difficult."¹⁰⁷

* * *

Engert's focus was rightly on the war effort. The situation for the Allies was bleak. Although the U.S. was not yet officially a combatant, Engert had already made a sizable personal contribution to the Allied war effort.

Engert's diplomatic roles were not limited to his

¹⁰⁵Ibid, p. 241.

¹⁰⁶Secretary of State to Engert, telegram no. 214, 28 November 1941, FRUS, 1941, vol. III, p. 807.

¹⁰⁷Engert to Secretary of State, telegram no. 468, 27 November 1941, FRUS, 1941, vol. III, p. 806.

warnings of German invasion, nor his mediation between the warring parties. He also reintroduced the Lebanese to the concept of America as a patron who could possibly protect them from the guns of the French and the British.

Engert did not make any recommendations for a change in U.S. policy or identify any need for diplomatic initiatives, as he had done so actively in March and April in the case of the German threat to the Levant.

It would take more internal Lebanese political developments, the U.S. entry into the war, and a different U.S. Consul General to perceive the fundamental changes in the nature of U.S. interests and its ability to influence events in Lebanon.

CHAPTER THREE

FROM MEDIATION TO TAKING SIDES: THE EVOLUTION OF AMERICAN POLICY IN LEBANON

We have based policy on the Atlantic Charter and talked of the four freedoms; while Arab leaders here continued to nurse four fears--of French imperialism, British insincerity, American isolationism, and Zionist expansionism. ...disillusionment as to our political influence with our allies might well be a result of our accepting without some qualification the fait accompli in this country.¹⁰⁸

The French rejection of the 1936 Franco-Lebanese Treaty, French defeat in June 1940, and British occupation in July 1941 following the completion of the Syrian campaign were the initial steps along the path to Lebanese independence. These events set the conditions which made possible the next stage in Lebanon's struggle for independence.

This next phase consisted of several steps. The first was the process of forging a national coalition, or "Moslem-Christian understanding" as Lebanese historian Kamal Salibi described it, from the different communities in Lebanon.¹⁰⁹ This understanding became known as the Lebanese National Pact and was necessary to reconcile the diverse images of Lebanese independence which were held by different confessional groups.

The second and third steps were the Crises of November 1943 and May-June 1945. The first crisis served to unite the

¹⁰⁸Wadsworth to Secretary of State, telegram no. 115, 23 Mar 1943, FRUS, 1943, vol. IV, p. 964.

¹⁰⁹Kamal Salibi, The Modern History of Lebanon (New York: Praeger, 1965), p.187.

Lebanese population behind the Lebanese nationalists and against the French. The second crisis was a test of that independence over the issue of the withdrawal of foreign troops.

* * *

Le Général de Gaulle pense que l'indépendance promise concerne l'avenir, tandis que le gouvernement britannique la juge réalisable dans l'immédiat...Mais nous autres libanais, nous sentions bien que les Alliés ne s'entendaient pas sur la question du Levant. Et nous avons su mettre leur désaccord à profit.¹¹⁰

The struggle for the independence of Lebanon has also been described as a "three-sided game in which the Levantines, whose skills had been underrated, were dealt some excellent cards."¹¹¹ Lebanese nationalists were much quicker than the British or the Americans in grasping the intentions of the Free French in Lebanon. The exploitation of Anglo-French rivalry by Lebanese nationalists was a natural step in order to expedite Lebanese independence.

The United States played a diplomatic role that was certainly less conspicuous than Britain's eventual military intervention and confrontation with France. Notwithstanding, the historical record indicates that the American diplomatic role in Lebanon during this period of the Second World War was certainly more intricate and pivotal than has usually been

¹¹⁰Nicolas de Bustros, Je me souviens (Beirut, 1983), p. 92.

¹¹¹Gaunson, p. 186.

acknowledged.

The policy of the United States towards Lebanon evolved slowly during 1942 and 1943. The changes in policy were mainly a result of America's entry into the war, internal political developments in Lebanon, and also of the personal influence of the Consul General of the United States in Beirut. American recognition of British hegemony in the Middle East, antipathy to De Gaulle's Free French, and commitment to anti-colonialism played much smaller roles.

In the chapter's opening quotation, George Wadsworth, who was named U.S. Diplomatic Agent and Consul General in Beirut in October 1942, poignantly described Lebanese fears and the possible danger to America's image by ignoring them. Lebanese nationalist, French, British, and American perceptions of the reality of the situation that existed in Lebanon prior to the November 1943 Franco-Lebanese Crisis seemed to depend more on their respective perceptions than on any objective reality.

* * *

Although the Middle East was the center of the Anglo-American war effort until the surrender of the last German and Italian troops in Tunisia in May 1943, the termination of hostilities in the Levant in July 1941 returned Lebanon to the status of a military backwater for the duration of the war. Nevertheless, the Anglo-French political rivalry in Lebanon would result in Great Britain maintaining a military presence in Lebanon and Syria throughout the war that could not be

justified purely in military terms.

The focus of the war for Great Britain at that time was Rommel's Deutsches Afrika-Korps, which posed what was perceived as a constant threat to Egypt and the Suez Canal. From the beginning of his offensive in March 1941, until Montgomery's victory at El-Alamein in November 1942, Rommel seemed invincible.

De Gaulle's Free French were engaged in a struggle for legitimacy and to "reinstate France as a belligerent, to prevent her subversion, to restore a destiny..."¹¹² Despite his support from Churchill, De Gaulle was frustrated at his inability to persuade Washington to recognize the Free French as the representatives of France, disavow its relations with the Vichy government, and cease making expedient deals with French local authorities that challenged Free French authority. De Gaulle's frustration was compounded in 1942 as he watched the United States and her leaders become the "directors of the coalition" which must liberate France.¹¹³

By the end of 1942, the Allies' fortunes of war had turned for the better. El Alamein in North Africa, Midway in the Pacific, and Stalingrad on the Russo-German Front served as turning points for the Allies. Even the Free French finally saw success in combat; the gallant defense of Bir

¹¹²De Gaulle, p. 311.

¹¹³Ibid, p. 307.

Hakeim by General Keonig's 1st Free French Brigade (which ironically included a Lebanese contingent) in May-June 1942 signified the return of France to the battlefield on the side of the Allies.

* * *

A.B. Gaunson's comparison of Lebanon's struggle for independence to a "three-sided [card] game" should be expanded. In Lebanon, the reality was that there was often much confusion as to who was actually seated as the representatives for France, Britain and Lebanon in the three-sided card game which was about to be played for control of Lebanon. Moreover, the United States was clearly in the room and passing chips and information to all of the players at different times.

The Free French position was clearly to maintain the French empire. Yet, the details of that position are difficult to ascertain. Georges Bidault, who served as De Gaulle's foreign minister in 1944, later noted the discrepancies in historical accounts:

Il suffit de comparer les Mémoires de Guerre du général De Gaulle et l'important ouvrage où le général Catroux a rapporté sa mission au Levant pour s'apercevoir que les deux hommes donnent des événements des versions absolument non concordantes.¹¹⁴

In discussing the Free French position it is necessary to avoid anachronism in judging the Free French policy of

¹¹⁴Georges Bidault, D'Une Resistance A L'Autre (Paris: Les Presses du Siecle, 1965), p. 101.

announcing the end of the Mandate and Lebanese independence, and then making those declarations subject to agreement to a treaty. Subsequent announcements indicated that the treaty might have to wait until the end of the war, or declared that it would have to include provisions for French military bases and exclusive French economic rights, both guaranteeing a continued French presence in Lebanon. The French, with some justification, saw their policy as analogous to British positions in Iraq, Egypt, and mandatory Palestine.

Catroux's public statements calling in June 1941 for an end to the mandate and independence, and then in November 1941 declaring Lebanese independence, had also been expressed in a letter to him from De Gaulle dated 24 June 1941 that added that "...the 1936 treaty of alliance is the starting point for negotiations with Lebanon and Syria."¹¹⁵

Lebanese accounts seem to attribute the Free French failure to simply cause some improvement in the conditions in Lebanon as instrumental in setting the stage for the Crisis of November 1943. As already cited, Bishara al-Khuri's account of events centers on Catroux's failure to initiate a speedy return to constitutional government. Sami al-Sulh, who served under Alfred Naccache as the President of the Council and was also Riad al-Sulh's cousin, was more concerned with the lack of the outward appearances of independence and

¹¹⁵Excerpt in Engert to Secretary of State, telegram no. 404, 8 Oct 1941.

especially the lack of an attempt to put Lebanese in positions of responsibility within the bureaucracy that controlled the country.¹¹⁶

In his memoirs, Catroux explained his opposition to a return to constitutional rule on the grounds that it would mean a return to violent confessional battles, the growing interference of General Edward Spears' British agents in Franco-Lebanese affairs, and, perhaps most importantly, "l'opposition que manifestait le Général de Gaulle à la remise en place de la Chambre Libanaise."¹¹⁷ Catroux was also critical of the mandatory administrators that he inherited from the Vichy regime.

Bishara al-Khuri said that the result of the Anglo-Free French invasion was that "everything remained the same, i.e. authority remained in the hands of the French."¹¹⁸ This meant that Lebanese politicians who refused to be coopted by the French were forced to form coalitions that crossed confessional lines in order to satisfy their ambitions.

French historian Charles-André Julien, along with most Frenchmen, placed most of the blame for the crises in Lebanon on Spears, he also argued [using a poker metaphor] that:

It seems that the representatives of Free France had set their hearts on playing their worst cards.

¹¹⁶Sulh, p. 76.

¹¹⁷Catroux, p. 222.

¹¹⁸Khuri, vol. I, p. 242.

Against the English technicians they chose to oppose blasé old functionaires, foolhardy officers or arrogant and inexperienced young men. They did not seem to wish sincerely to keep the promises that had been made, and delighted in making subtle interpretations of General Catroux's proclamations which deprived them of their imperative character.¹¹⁹

The dilemmas of British policy have been exposed in the memoirs of the participants and in the official documents. A.B. Gaunson summarizes British interests in Lebanon as military security, Arab goodwill, and satisfactory relations with Free France.¹²⁰ The contradictory nature of these interests as well as what William Roger Louis terms "an important lesson about nationalism" would become apparent much later.¹²¹

It is symbolic that the irreconcilable principles of Lebanese independence and French preeminence in Lebanon that comprised British policy would be given to a single man to execute. General Edward Spears, Churchill's friend who had served as a Member of Parliament since 1931, was knighted in December 1941. He returned to Beirut in January 1942 as British Minister to the Levant and continued as Anglo-Free French liaison chief in the Levant.

Unfortunately for the French, Spears had undergone a conversion in the days following the Anglo-Free French

¹¹⁹Charles-Andre Julien, "French Difficulties in the Middle East," Foreign Affairs. Vol. 24, No. 2, January 1946, pp. 327-36.

¹²⁰Gaunson, p. 186.

¹²¹Louis, p. 171.

invasion of Levant. Gaunson humorously describes in Orwellian terms the disgust and dismay that Spears felt in watching Vichyists, Gaullists, and Vichyists who had become instant-Gaullists, and not being able to tell the difference.¹²²

The stories told by observers are also poignant. Alec Kirkbride was serving as the British Resident in Amman in June 1941. He met two French acquaintances of his who had previously resisted all his entreaties to join De Gaulle, and who now claimed that they were Gaullists. When he asked them why they had changed their minds, they responded that their car had broken down during the retreat, so they became Free French at once!¹²³

General William Slim, who would later win fame in Burma, has a story that is even more biting. Slim had entered Deir-ez-zor in Syria with the lead elements of his 10th Indian Division in July 1941, and observed while greeting a receiving line of newly liberated functionaries of the town that:

As I moved along...I caught sight of a French officer in uniform standing last in the row. I was intrigued to know who he was, because as far as I knew no French, other than prisoners, had remained in the town...it was explained to me that up until a couple of hours ago he had been the Vichy chief of police; he was still chief of police but...he was now a staunch de Gaullist.

I was a little suspicious of so speedy and

¹²²Gaunson, p. 83.

¹²³Alec Kirkbride, A Crackle of Thorns (London: John Murray, 1956), p. 151.

opportune a conversion and resolved to keep an eye on him.¹²⁴

For Lebanese nationalists independence was the only objective. In order to obtain it, it might be necessary to listen to German propaganda from Von Hentig, Vichy propaganda from Dentz, Spears' propaganda against the Free French, or even to cheer De Gaulle when he came to visit. The differences between Pétain and De Gaulle were difficult to perceive from Beirut. The faces and policies of the mandatory administration remained the same.

* * *

C'est une donnée de fait qu'un Français anglophile qui va au Levant succombe très vite à l'anglophobie régnante...Un Français me dit un jour au rivage sublime de la mer phénicienne, ces propos satiriques qui peignent un climat: 'Vous n'avez donc pas lu la troisième aux Corinthiens? Paul y écrit: Dieu préfère un Français qui blasphème à un Anglais qui prie.'¹²⁵

George Bidault admits that as De Gaulle's Foreign Minister in 1945 he did not understand either De Gaulle's previous nor future policy in the Levant. He mentions that De Gaulle always spoke of the Levant "avec véhémence, sans laconisme, mais sans beaucoup de lumière non plus."¹²⁶ Bidault makes it clear that there was a great disagreement between Catroux and De Gaulle on the issue of independence for Syria

¹²⁴William Slim, Unofficial History (London: Cassell, 1959), p. 173.

¹²⁵Bidault, p. 102.

¹²⁶Ibid., p. 102.

and Lebanon, but following the example of their memoirs, does not give any details.¹²⁷

Bidault does offer an interesting theory to explain De Gaulle's policy in the Levant and his anglophobia. He attributes it directly to the period that De Gaulle spent in the Levant as a young intelligence officer from 1930 to 1933. However, De Gaulle's official biographer, Jean Lacouture, attributes that same sojourn of De Gaulle in Beirut as the inspiration for his later decision to support Algerian independence.¹²⁸ It seems more likely that De Gaulle, the military strategist, was probably, even in Beirut, focused on the problems of France's position in Central Europe and not overly concerned with the self-determination of native peoples. However, the British challenge to France's rightful place in the world order is a recurring topic in his memoirs.

In his memoirs De Gaulle makes no mention of his service in the Near East, but does make a special reference to the impact of studying the story of the French surrender of the Upper Nile region to the superior forces of the British at Fashoda. This comparison between the events of Fashoda and those of the Levant was often repeated by Frenchmen during the

¹²⁷Ibid., pp. 101-104.

¹²⁸Jean Lacouture, De Gaulle (London: Hutchinson, 1970), pp. 19, 34.

next three years.¹²⁹

* * *

I deplored the presence in the country of too many would-be Lawrences whose actions tended to incite the natives to play the British against the Free French.¹³⁰

Spears was soon perceived as playing the role of T.E. Lawrence. He called for a return to constitutional government in Lebanon and for new parliamentary elections. The Lebanese President, who was first appointed by the Vichy government and now was reappointed by the Gaullists, complained to the American Consul General of Spears' interference in Lebanese affairs and requested U.S. recognition of his own government. The Lebanese nationalists under Bishara al-Khuri were unsuccessful in their attempts to convince Catroux to return to constitutional rule and started a campaign to acquire British, American and Arab support.¹³¹

Khuri and his followers sent a memorandum to the American Consul General addressed to President Roosevelt that was signed by 27 prominent Lebanese including 3 Archbishops, 6 former cabinet ministers and 15 deputies. In this

¹²⁹De Gaulle, p. 4. For a description of the Fashoda Crisis, see Robert O. Collins and Robert L. Tignor, Egypt and the Sudan (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1967), pp. 92-93, 114-117.

¹³⁰Edward Spears, Fulfillment of a Mission (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1977), pp. 115-6.

¹³¹See Bustros, pp. 89-92, for his account of meeting Spears and setting up his initial meeting with Bishara al-Khuri.

memorandum Engert notes that "they considered themselves more representative than the new Lebanese government" and wanted to insure "no agreement is signed with the Free French which might be derogatory to the permanent rights and interests of an independent state."¹³²

This memorandum marked the beginning of an large number of communications, primarily from Lebanese Christians, directed at the American legation in order to influence American policy. The next step was in April 1942 when Lebanese President Alfred Naccache, who had been appointed by Catroux, came to Engert complaining of both Catroux and Spears. Naccache complained that Spears' proposal to hold elections within the next six months threatened internal security, and that the disagreements between Spears and Catroux were affecting "the dignity of his own position."¹³³

A subsequent conversation between Engert and Spears set a new trend in America's wartime diplomatic relationship in Beirut with Britain. Engert reported to Washington that Spears was "obsessed with the idea that Catroux is trying to doublecross him." Spears also told Engert that he believed that Catroux was planning to replace Naccache with Bishara al-Khuri in order to obtain the support of the Maronite

¹³²Engert to Secretary of State, telegram no. 226, 7 Dec 1941, 890E.01/116, National Archives Microfilm Publications.

¹³³Engert to Secretary of State, telegram no. 135, 15 April 1942, FRUS, 1942, vol. IV, pp. 586-7.

Patriarch, and that he opposed that plan.¹³⁴

Engert's break with Spears was mainly over the issue of giving priority to winning the war, and supporting allies. The overriding issue for him was that Spears' conflict with the French and his other actions were possible threats to the stability of the region, and Allied harmony. Engert mentioned in the same telegram that "...our relations with Vichy are entering upon such a critical stage."

It is interesting that Spears and Catroux both speak highly of Engert in their memoirs. Spears, who was highly critical about all other aspects of the Treaty of Acre, after Engert's role during the 1941 invasion commented that:

Engert...was one of the very best friends Britain ever had. He had absolute faith in our ultimate victory...He was completely devoted to his duties; he considered it his overriding task to do what he could to bring the conflict in the Levant to an end.¹³⁵

Engert quickly reassumed the role of mediator. He came up with four suggestions to resolve the impasse between Britain and Free France, and was given discretion by the Secretary of State to present them to Spears and Catroux. These suggestions called for: 1) the British to insist that they alone are responsible for military security in the Levant; 2) the British to acknowledge that their presence in the Levant was temporary; 3) Free French should take more

¹³⁴Engert to Secretary of State, telegram no. 139, 18 April 1942, FRUS, 1942, vol. IV, pp. 587-8.

¹³⁵Spears, p. 122.

steps to make independence of Syria and Lebanon more of a reality; 4) A Maronite acceptable to both Spears and Catroux should be included in Naccache's cabinet, and "elections could be promised to take place as soon as the military situation permits."¹³⁶

The United States had broken with Great Britain on the issue of elections. The records indicate that this was a definite policy decision where the Secretary of State supported the recommendations of the foreign service officer in the field. The traditional supporter of the self-determination of peoples was now in support of an indefinite postponement of elections by the French.¹³⁷

Engert's attempts at mediation continued with success, as Catroux reacted to his efforts to improve the tone in Anglo-French relations by offering to compromise on the issue of elections and agreeing to hold them by the end of the year.¹³⁸ The U.S. mediation effort changed its face again as Engert departed to become the U.S. Minister to Afghanistan in July 1942. His place was taken temporarily by William Gwynn, who had been serving under him as U.S. Consul in Damascus.

Engert's reports and the negotiations that were ongoing

¹³⁶Engert to Secretary of State, telegram no. 142, 21 April 1942, FRUS, 1942, vol. IV, p. 591.

¹³⁷See G.V. Allen, NEA, Memorandum for the files, 17 Aug 1942, 890E.01/42, National Archives Microfilm Publications.

¹³⁸Engert to Secretary of State, telegram no. 195, 30 May 1942, FRUS, 1942, vol. IV, pp. 596-3.

with Vichy in an attempt to facilitate the invasion of North Africa resulted in an initial American policy that expressed sympathy for independence for Syria and Lebanon, but avoided recognition in order to not antagonize either Vichy or De Gaulle, and not to "aid an allegedly nefarious British scheme."¹³⁹

Gwynn assumed the duties of Consul General in Beirut and immediately asked for guidance from the State Department, while issuing scathing criticism of Spears. He recommended that the U.S. cease its mediation effort as he thought Engert was having no results. Gwynn also ridiculed the idea of having elections in wartime, when elections were not being held in Iraq, Palestine, or England itself. He further expressed disapproval of the Department's plan to increase the level of U.S. diplomatic representation in Lebanon and Syria.¹⁴⁰

During De Gaulle's visits to Beirut in August and September 1942, Gwynn participated in a series of discussions with De Gaulle that gave the State Department an unparalleled opportunity to be presented with De Gaulle's plan for the Levant and his personality. At De Gaulle's orders, Catroux passed to Gwynn the entire documentary record of Free French

¹³⁹Gaddis Smith, p. 106.

¹⁴⁰See FRUS, 1942, vol. IV, pp. 598-610.

complaints against Spears.¹⁴¹

De Gaulle was happy with the U.S. interest in the French viewpoint. These documents caused Foy Kohler in the State Department to conclude that British "motives and objectives may be questionable and certainly bear watching."

Unfortunately for De Gaulle, neither the Division of Near Eastern Affairs, nor anyone else in the State Department was able to present many pro-Gaullist views to Secretary Hull, especially in the last days before the TORCH landings in North Africa.¹⁴²

Unfortunately for De Gaulle, Kohler's memo also concluded that French policy was a "complete negation of the principles we have embraced in the Four Freedoms and the Atlantic Charter." George Wadsworth, who had been named as Diplomatic Agent and Consul General to Lebanon and Syria was in Washington at the time, getting briefed prior to reporting to Beirut, and surely saw Kohler's conclusions. Wadsworth had served as a teacher at Syrian Protestant College [AUB] from 1914 to 1917, and as a clerk in the legation at Beirut from 1916 to 1917. Kohler's idealistic references to the Four Freedoms and the Atlantic Charter would soon appear in

¹⁴¹Gwynn to Secretary of State, telegram no. 481, 24 Sep 1942, 890E.01/171, and Foy D. Kohler, NEA memo, 2 Nov 1942, Subject: Fighting French-British Relations in the States of the Levant.

¹⁴²See Childs, p. 133. He says the only Department officers with a "realistic appreciation of the French situation were A.A. Berle [Asst. Secy.] and H.S. Villard [NEA]."

Wadsworth's reports.

The debate over elections continued. Spears was criticized in the Foreign Office and elsewhere by those who resented his influence with Churchill.¹⁴³ De Gaulle repeatedly called for his replacement. American policy towards Lebanon would enter the beginning of its last phase during the Second World War with the arrival of Wadsworth in Beirut on 16 November 1942.

The timing of Wadsworth's arrival was perhaps more significant than the increase in diplomatic status that his new title and the new buildings for the American Legation suggested. Pearl Harbor brought America into the Second World War on the side of the Allies. However, it was the American military role in the invasion of North Africa on 8 November 1942 that secured its popular image as the senior partner among the Allies, rather than the economic role that it was already playing in supplying both Great Britain and the Soviet Union.

Wadsworth's arrival in Beirut was concurrent with the increase in Lebanese political activity that accompanied the reluctant French decision to hold elections. Gwynn was completely insensitive to any need to have contacts with Lebanese nationalists, and Engert felt that their interests

¹⁴³For a sample of British criticism of Spears, see John Harvey ed., The War Diaries of Oliver Harvey, 1941-1945 (London: Collins, 1978) and Duff Cooper, Old Men Forget (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1953).

would have to be subjugated to that of the war effort, Wadsworth would represent a new sensitivity to Lebanese interests that was a product both of his realization of America's new role, and perhaps also a result of his own extensive knowledge of the region.

* * *

Anglo-French rivalry in Lebanon relaxed at the end of 1942. The United States retreated from its open criticism of Spears, while De Gaulle fought a political battle for his very existence in North Africa following the Anglo-American deals with Admiral Darlan and General Giraud.

Lebanese President Naccache once again came to the U.S. legation in January 1943 with complaints that Catroux was planning to force him to resign. Catroux finally dismissed Naccache in March 1943, ostensibly in order to appoint a head of government who would prepare the way for Lebanese parliamentary elections on 29 August 1943.

Catroux told Bishara al-Khuri that the new Lebanese head of government was "neutral." Khuri replied that his new appointee, Dr. Ayyub Tabet, was not neutral, because Tabet had opposed him in the 1936 presidential elections.¹⁴⁴ Tabet's appointment launched an electoral fury which became an electoral crisis in June 1943, which threatened the concept of Greater Lebanon.

¹⁴⁴Khuri, vol. I, p. 250.

The crisis occurred when Tabet's government issued decrees that prescribed the number and sectarian affiliation of the deputies that would be chosen in the upcoming parliamentary elections. The new decrees provided for additional seats for the Maronite Christians of Mount Lebanon based on emigrant Lebanese who continued to hold Lebanese citizenship.

Wadsworth reported this as a French action that was prompted by "desire to see strengthened parliamentary representation of the one important sect (Maronite) whose religious leaders' political creed is a Christian controlled Lebanon independent of the Moslem hinterland and protected by Catholic France." Wadsworth also reported that the Muslim response to this action was that "if Maronite Mount Lebanon truly preferred French protection to Arab federation, the remaining districts with their Moslem majorities should rejoin Syria." Foremost among the Muslim leaders in Beirut was Riad al-Sulh, who declared: "Lebanon is Arab and must find its strength in union with the Arab world."¹⁴⁵

Wadsworth had contacts during this period with Lebanese politicians of all persuasions, who urgently sought U.S. support and approval. Dr. Tabet was replaced in mid-July due to the electoral crisis by Petro Trad, the Greek Orthodox President of the last Chamber of Deputies.

¹⁴⁵Wadsworth to Secretary of State, telegram no. 214, 24 June 1943, FRUS, 1943, vol IV, p. 977.

The U.S. involvement with Dr. Tabet raises some questions. Tabet was a Protestant whom Spears supposedly described in his diary as a supporter of a pro-French Lebanon.¹⁴⁶ Wadsworth reported favorably on Tabet on several occasions, including a comment from President Dodge of AUB that Dodge considered him an honest Lebanese patriot and the best available presidential candidate.¹⁴⁷

It appears that the U.S. relationship with Dr. Tabet ended there, although Wadsworth reported a pre-election conversation with Tabet, where he described Tabet's support for a smaller, more Christian Lebanon that gave more equality to a smaller Muslim minority. In this same report he stated that Spears' "...ideal was a truly independent greater Lebanon."¹⁴⁸

The electoral crisis continued into August 1943 with the direct intervention of Spears, Jean Helleu (who formally replaced Catroux in July 1943), and Nahas Pasha, the Prime Minister of Egypt. Wadsworth reported in early August that the electoral crisis was finally solved with a Catroux initiative, on the basis of a Nahas proposal, that was

¹⁴⁶Gaunson, pp. 113-4.

¹⁴⁷Wadsworth to Secretary of State, telegram no. 188, 24 May 1943, FRUS, 1943, vol. IV, p.971.

¹⁴⁸Wadsworth to Secretary of State, telegram no. 244, 4 Aug 1943, FRUS, 1943, vol. IV, pp. 983-4. See Meir Zamir, The Formation of Modern Lebanon (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985) for his treatment of 'Greater Lebanon.'

modified by a Spears amendment, which was finally agreed to by the Mufti of Lebanon, and made law by a decree from Helleu. Helleu and Spears joined in the announcement that there would be 55 deputies in Parliament, the ratio of Christians to Muslims would be 6:5, and that a general census would be held in two years.¹⁴⁹

* * *

The Lebanese parliamentary elections took place on 29 August 1943. On 22 September, Bishara al-Khuri was elected almost unanimously by the Chamber of Deputies as the first President of the Republic of Lebanon. He received the support of Spears, the government of Syria, and the Lebanese Muslims, in addition to his own Christian followers. His defeat of his old rival, Emile Éddé, was also a signal to France that a profound transformation had taken place in Lebanese politics.

The critical question had always been Lebanon's relationship to the Arab or Muslim Worlds vis-à-vis its relationship to the Christian West, and especially France. The formula which resolved this dilemma was the Lebanese National Pact, an "unwritten gentlemen's agreement to supplement the constitution and have equal effectiveness." Salibi further describes the essential nature of the pact as:

...Muslim consent to the continued existence of Lebanon as an independent and sovereign state in

¹⁴⁹Wadsworth to Secretary of State, telegram no. 243, 2 Aug 1943, FRUS, 1943, vol. IV, pp. 980-2.

the Arab world, provided it considered itself, so to speak, part of the Arab family.¹⁵⁰

Khuri didn't say much about the formation of the National Pact in his memoirs. He mentioned only that on 19 September 1943, three days before his election, he met with Riad al-Sulh and the pact was the result.¹⁵¹ Khuri also mentioned in his memoirs his consultations with Syrian nationalist Jamil Mardam and their meetings with Nahas Pasha in Cairo in May 1942.¹⁵² It is not clear whether these meetings with other prominent Arab nationalists were related to his compromise agreement with Riad al-Sulh.

Riad al-Sulh was elected the first Premier and Sabri Hamadi was elected President of the Chamber of Deputies. The precedent was met for selecting a Maronite as President, a Sunni Muslim as Premier, and a Shi'i as President of the Chamber of Deputies.

* * *

In Lebanon Prime Minister Riyad es Solh profited by the absence of the Delegate General, M. Helleu, who had gone to Algiers for instructions, to "abrogate" by decree the League of Nations mandate. The Premier in this acted contrary to solemn promises he had made; and he did not deny that he did so.¹⁵³

Julien describes above the French view of the events

¹⁵⁰Kamal Salibi, A House of Many Mansions (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), p. 186.

¹⁵¹Khuri, vol. II, p. 17.

¹⁵²Ibid, vol. I, pp. 242-3.

¹⁵³Julien, p. 333.

which started the Franco-Lebanese Crisis of November 1943. Helleu's response was to arrest the President and most of the Cabinet, suspend the constitution, and dissolve the Chamber of Deputies. He did this at 4 a.m. after also giving his "word of honor" to Spears at a dinner party the night before that there would be no disturbances as a result of the actions of the new chamber.¹⁵⁴

Both the French and the British claimed that the other had staged the whole event. Rather, Spears is blamed for inciting the Lebanese Chamber of Deputies, while De Gaulle is blamed for having ordered the French response. There appears to be little information to support either contention.

The only apparent evidence of Spears' involvement in the Lebanese actions is a quote from his diary indicating that none of the Lebanese had exposed him as their "chief source of inspiration."¹⁵⁵ Khuri only praises Spears' role in supporting their actions. This role was indeed impressive, for as soon as Khuri's son staggered into his room in the early hours of the morning, Spears was on the phone to R.G. Casey in Cairo, who had replaced Oliver Lyttleton as the British Minister of State, Resident in the Middle East.¹⁵⁶

Although Helleu made a great show in front of the press,

¹⁵⁴Spears, p. 225.

¹⁵⁵Gaunson, pp. 124-5.

¹⁵⁶Spears, pp. 226-7.

reading a telegram from De Gaulle indicating support for his action, both Catroux's account and Free French documents seem to indicate that Helleu's response was planned in Beirut by a "resentful clique of old Vichy colonialists."¹⁵⁷ Their actions were to set off strikes and demonstrations that united the country against the French.¹⁵⁸

General Catroux went to Cairo for discussions with Casey and finally to Lebanon. Catroux displayed unwillingness to quickly accede to British demands for the immediate reinstatement of the Khuri-Sulh government. He was also unsuccessful in his attempt, once again, to coopt Bishara al-Khuri. When Catroux continued to drag his feet, even Foreign Secretary Eden urged the threat of the introduction of British martial law in Lebanon. Eden's action was influenced by the fact that Churchill was in Cairo at the time.¹⁵⁹

The French released and reinstated the Lebanese government on 24 November 1943. Catroux graciously called upon them in their offices, and appointed a M. Chataigneau, who was "actually liked and admired by Spears," as the

¹⁵⁷Gaunson, pp. 125-6.

¹⁵⁸Philip S. Khoury, p. 615.

¹⁵⁹See Harold Macmillan, War Diaries (London: Macmillan, 1984) for Churchill's views on the Lebanese Crisis. He was serving as British representative to the Free French in Algiers and present at most of the Cairo Conference discussions.

temporary French Delegate-General.¹⁶⁰ However, Catroux is said to have told his colleagues that the British threat to use troops against France was a "second Fashoda."¹⁶¹

The November 1943 crisis was termed the "wartime turning point in the affairs of the Levant."¹⁶² The crisis united the population of Lebanon behind their leaders and the National Pact and "signalled the end of the French Mandate."¹⁶³ Spears was soon caught in the contradiction of British policy and told at the end of November by Eden that despite recent events he should be working to bring about treaties between France and Lebanon.¹⁶⁴

The November 1943 Crisis served as Spears' swan song, for his enemies finally convinced Churchill to replace him in December 1944. His influence with Churchill had waned prior to that. His successor, Terence Shone, quickly came to the same conclusions that he had about Britain's contradictory policy. The Foreign Office was dismayed to find out that despite Spears' departure, Anglo-French rivalry continued.

Wadsworth was convinced that he had "witnessed historic events" and that it was clear that "the divergent strains of

¹⁶⁰Gaunson, p. 139.

¹⁶¹Julien, p. 333.

¹⁶²Louis, p. 165.

¹⁶³Philip S. Khoury, p. 615.

¹⁶⁴Gaunson, p. 140.

British policy...could not be reconciled."¹⁶⁵ Wadsworth became a relentless critic of the French demand for a preeminent position, as well as the British decision to support that claim.

Wadsworth produced many reports during the crisis and provided Washington with a variety of views of the events in Lebanon, as well as their impact. Here is an example:

Dr. Dodge, President American University, who has long years of experience here and has calm objective judgment...speaks of incredible folly of French who have thrown away their prestige in Levant finally and entirely and whose best friends (the Christian community) have now turned against them. He believes that a spark might set the whole country alight at any moment by reason of high emotional tension... If Catroux does not displace Helleu and release the members of the government (within a very short time) he is convinced that country will rise against the French (and that Syria will join in) and that they will be destroyed with great bloodshed.¹⁶⁶

Wadsworth probably at this time quoted Bayard Dodge, who was greatly respected and had many influential friends in Washington, in order to give this report the emphasis that he felt that this event deserved. His reports had their effect, and his superiors in Washington, who already were anti-Gaullist, became even more so.

Wadsworth's arguments against the French actions caused the United States to break with both the British and the

¹⁶⁵Louis, p. 165.

¹⁶⁶Casey to Foreign Office, 14 Nov 1943, quoted in Spears, p. 248.

French. The U.S. supported Lebanese independence, and stated that a preeminent position for France could only be granted with the approval of the Lebanese. On 19 September 1944 the United States extended "full and unconditional recognition of the independence of Lebanon and Syria," based on the "accelerated transfer of governmental powers" that resulted since November 1943.¹⁶⁷

* * *

Thus ended one of the most dramatic episodes of modern history. I cannot remember any other incident of the same nature in which the armies of two great allied powers, while a war was still in progress, threatened to turn their arms against one another in the interests of a third state too weak to defend itself...¹⁶⁸

During the May-June 1945 Crisis the French attempted to reinforce their troops in the Levant and thereby conduct a *fait accompli* in the same manner that they had in 1920 when they routed the army of Feisal's Arab Kingdom and established the mandate, prior to its being granted by the League of Nations. The French tactics were reminiscent of the Great Revolt, and so for the second time in twenty years, Damascus suffered artillery and air attacks and according to French figures over 600 Syrians and Lebanese were killed, along with 28 French and 25 of the *Troupes Spéciales*.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁷Secretary of State to Wadsworth, telegram no. 134, 5 Sep 1944, FRUS, 1944, vol. V, p. 774.

¹⁶⁸Glubb, p. 268.

¹⁶⁹Julien, pp. 334-5.

The Troupes Spéciales were at the center of the disagreement. France refused to transfer the approximately 18,000 native soldiers who were serving under French officers to the control of the local governments, unless Syria and Lebanon agreed to sign treaties with France that allowed military bases and economic concessions.

Demonstrations broke out in Beirut on 19 May 1945 after both Lebanese and Syrian governments refused to negotiate in the face of the growing escalation of French troop strength. Fierce fighting broke out in Damascus on 29 May, and on 31 May Churchill sent a message to De Gaulle that he had ordered a cease-fire and that French troops be restricted to their barracks.

Britain had no choice. Churchill's alternatives were to aid the French, let the French and the Syrians fight it out, or intervene and throw his entire weight behind the independence of Syria and Lebanon.¹⁷⁰

The end was inevitable, and marked the end of Anglo-French rivalry in the Middle East. France was still so dependent on Britain and the United States that it was unable to quickly deploy a sufficient number of troops to the Levant. British troops in the Levant outnumbered the French, and reinforcements were available in Palestine and Suez.

De Gaulle relied to British Ambassador Duff Cooper with a threat that later became a promise:

¹⁷⁰Louis, p. 148.

We are not, I admit, in a position to open hostilities against you at the present time. But you have insulted France and betrayed the West. This cannot be forgotten.¹⁷¹

The crisis occurred in the middle of the San Francisco Conference, which was devoted to the establishment of the United Nations Organization. The situation in the Levant, which the State Department had used as a sort of "test case for postwar colonial independence," now took on an additional importance.¹⁷² The Department was involved in negotiations with the French and Wadsworth was ordered to "not become involved in such a manner as to give the French the impression that you are assisting Lebanese efforts to find means of embarrassing them."¹⁷³

The Conference representatives from Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and Syria who sat down to talk about the Crisis in the Levant with Secretary of State Stettinus on 29 May 1945 were under much different conditions than those that Feisal was subjected to in Paris in 1919. This time the French arguments that the problem of the Middle East must be treated as whole, only resulted in the withdrawal of all foreign military forces within a year.

¹⁷¹De Gaulle, p. 889.

¹⁷²Louis, p. 165.

¹⁷³Acting Secretary of State Grew to Wadsworth, telegram no. 156, 29 May 1945, FRUS, 1945, vol. VIII, p. 1114. Grew was secretary to the U.S. delegation to the Paris Conference in 1919.

The Lebanese gained complete independence during the Second World War by exploiting the rivalries between two fading colonial powers and by encouraging the traditionally open door and anti-colonial policies of a would-be superpower.

The Lebanese political leaders who accomplished this task were forced to take many risks. Of course they risked their own lives in 1943, and in 1945 also risked the lives of their people when they challenged a militarily stronger opponent, with the hope that any violence would provoke the intervention of outside parties, and accelerate their progress to independence. Nevertheless, the most dangerous risk to their own political careers may have been in forming the political coalition between confessional groups that, despite a long tradition of communal polarization, was necessary in order to achieve the national political integration required for Lebanon to become an independent nation within its current borders.

CONCLUSION

The leadership to which the [Foreign] Service was entitled by virtue of its professional experience went by default. Ignored in the war planning, the Department could only carry on its routine diplomacy, unable to make its voice heard, or to exercise its initiative at critical policy junctures.¹⁷⁴

The United States played a significant role during the Second World War in Lebanon's struggle for independence without committing any troops or firing a shot. The U.S. role was conducted by its foreign service officers in Beirut, who managed to make their voices heard and displayed a great deal of initiative. Lebanon's status as a military backwater for most of the war probably increased Washington's uncharacteristic reliance on the advice of its career diplomatic professionals in Beirut and in the State Department.

The events of the Second World War allowed the Lebanese to form a national consensus and take advantage of Anglo-French rivalry in order to obtain their complete independence. Those same events, and America's new role in the world order provided an opportunity for the U.S. to make an active commitment in Lebanon to its long-standing policy of anti-imperialism that would allow the concepts of self-determination of peoples and the Open Door to be expressed.

There is no doubt that Lebanese nationalists attempted

¹⁷⁴Henry Villard, Affairs at State (New York: Crowell, 1965), p. 71.

to influence U.S. policy. U.S. patronage was sought as it had not been since the visit of the King-Crane Commission. It is difficult to determine if the Lebanese nationalists were effective at influencing U.S. policy.

The only way that the U.S. Legation in Beirut was clearly involved in the Lebanese game of playing the British against the French was in its role as a message center. The combination of the information provided by U.S. educational and cultural interests in Lebanon, along with the frequent contacts that U.S. diplomats had with representatives of all religious and political groups, may have given the U.S. legation a perspective on Lebanese reality that was better than that provided by Spears' political officers, or the French Sûreté.

The large amount of high-level contacts between the U.S. and Britain made the information that was passed to American diplomats very likely to be passed to various sections of the British Government. The French, the British Army, the Foreign Office, and especially the Spears Mission, seemed to use this method of backchannel communications with as much efficiency as the Lebanese nationalists.

The most important U.S. contribution, besides its steadfast support of Lebanese independence and sovereignty, may have been its refusal to provide patronage to any particular Lebanese politician or confessional group. That sort of intervention might have prejudiced the conditions

which forced the formation of the National Pact.

Cornelius van Engert, William Gwynn, and George Wadsworth represented the United States in Lebanon at critical points in both Lebanon's struggle for independence, and the U.S. transition from isolationism to the global responsibilities of a superpower. The policies that they recommended to Washington and were adopted, were a function of that evolution in America's role in the world and in Lebanese internal developments, not just temporary support for British, French or Lebanese Nationalist positions.

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